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ABSTRACT

Pen and ink drawings illustrate characterizations of 29 Navajo clans in this book, which is intended to acquaint young Navajo people and others with Navajo history and culture. The introduction discusses the significance of the Navajo clan system and the relationship among family bonds, self-esteem, and cultural values. The illustrated text tells the story of how the first four clans originated and how subsequent divisions created 25 additional clans. The origin of each clan name is briefly explained. For example, the Many Goats clan was named because they relied largely on the maintenance of large herds of livestock, especially goats, for their food. All clan names are printed in Navajo as well as English and Navajo words are used frequently in the text, accompanied by English equivalents or definitions. A chart of the Navajo kinship system with kinship terminology is appended. (JHZ)

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A HISTORY OF NAVAJO CLANS

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INTRODUCTION

This book is intended to acquaint young Navajo people and others with Navajo history and culture. The values of teaching the Navajo traditional ways of life must be retained and practiced to ensure the existence of the Navajo people. It is hoped that, by sharing this information with our young people, we will encourage them and others to read and feel proud to be a Navajo.

We know that in today's society, many Navajo children and their parents do not understand the Navajo term "K'é"; some are unaware of what clan they belong to or who they are born for. It is sad to find many do not even bother to find out. The Navajo term "K'é" means "compassion," "cooperation," "friendliness," "unselfishness," "peacefulness," and all those positive virtues which constitute intense, diffuse, and enduring solidarity. The term "K'é" is this term (K'éí) which is used to signify the system of descent relationships and categories found in Navajo culture. "Shik'éí" ("my relatives by descent") distinguishes a group of relatives with whom one relates according to a special kind of K'é. This term also expresses correct forms of address and behavior toward others and the natural world around us. It is the foundation for the traditional philosophy of teaching which remains an important aspect of the Navajo today.

To fully understand this term, one must first develop a sense of self-awareness and a positive self-image. We sometimes refer to this as self-identity. For all human beings, self-identity is defined in terms of our relationship with others. These relationships enable us to survive and cope, and make life meaningful. For a young child such social relationships are based primarily on kinship ties which extend from the nuclear family (mother, father, siblings) to more distant relatives (grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins) and clan relatives.

The goal of this text, then, is to teach self-identity, and through this to instill the values of Navajo history, culture, kinship and clanship, so that those values will be preserved for our children, for their children, and for generations to come.

TO BE A NAVAJO

I am who I am,
and shall never deny it.
Some ideals and thoughts may come and go
like the passing tide.
Yet seated into the deep recesses of my soul
are the values
that I treasure deeply.
Here,
they, like a mighty fortress
guard,
support,
and protect
my pride and my dignity;
and quickly healing superficial wounds to them.
They repair damage
and
push me ever forward
untiringly.

I am who I am
and shall never deny it.

For denying it would be
declaring the end of my own
identity
and
existence.

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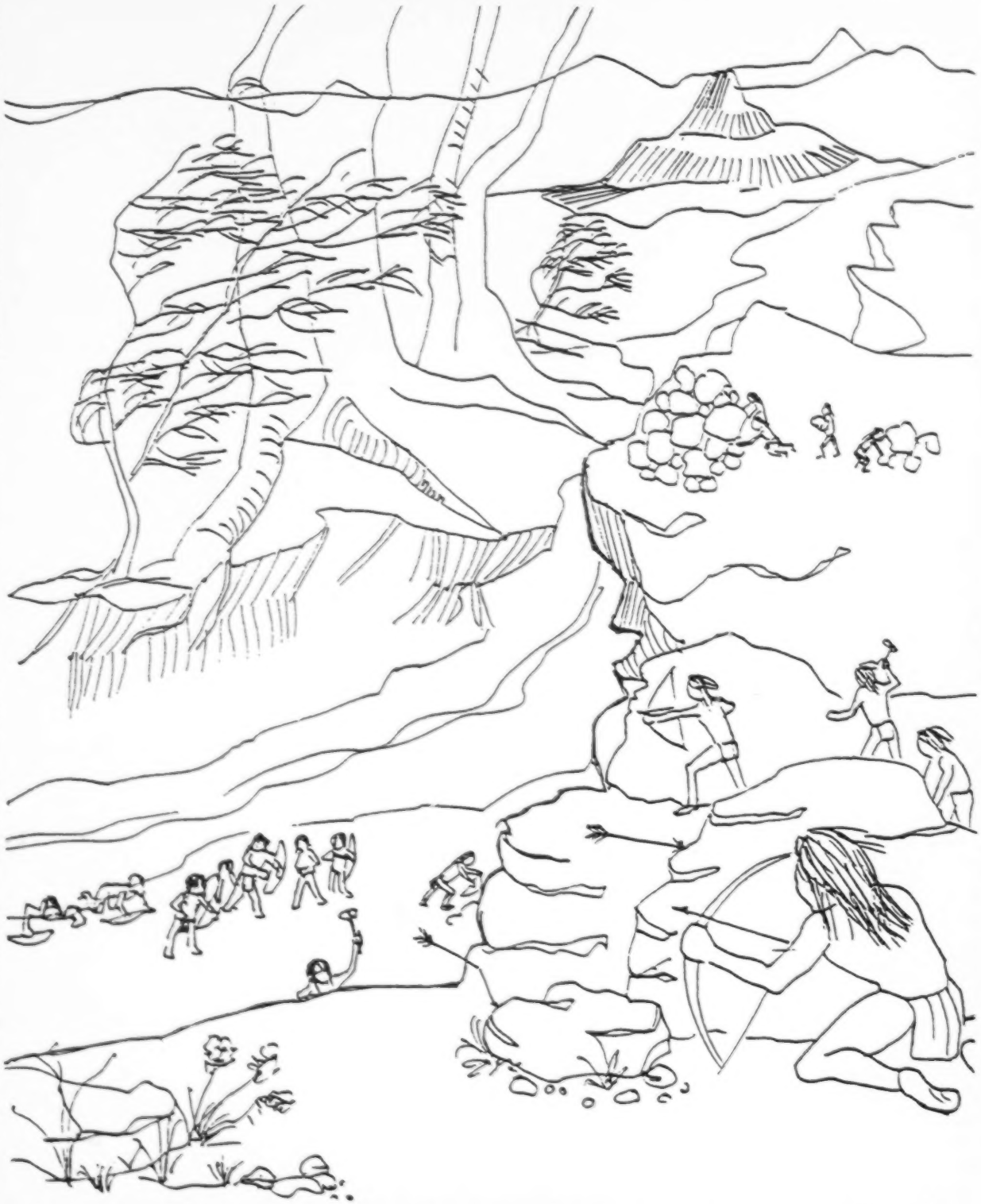
HISTORY OF CLANS

What follows is a brief history relating how the First Four (4) Clans originated.

In the beginning of time, after the emergence, the people quarreled at a place called "People Amongst," Dinétah. During that time, the decision was made by the chief-leaders to send "Changing Woman," also known as "White Shell Woman," to the West to live.

Changing Woman was reassured that the Moon and the Sun would be there to set each day to rest, and that she wouldn't be alone. She was to take care of the Sun and the Moon. She hesitated, but in spite of this she was sent on her journey to the west after performing several "Blessing Way, (Hózhǫ́ǫjí) ceremonies on herself.



At this time The People feuded among themselves. As a punishment to her people to teach them not to quarrel, Changing Woman took with her all different kinds of essential natural valuables: Herbs/Plants, Dark Clouds, Dark Sky, Female and Male Rain, Wild Game, and the Sacred Mountains.

Back on the mainland the People, Diné, were having difficult times with the weather and nature as a whole. It had not rained for quite sometime and a bad drought had set in. Because it was so dry, forest, brush and prairie fires began. The People thought aloud: "Why doesn't it rain? What have we done to deserve such a punishment?". It took The People awhile to discover that "Changing Woman" had done this because of the quarrels they were having among themselves.

Immediately, a council was held. It was decided that an investigation should be made of the situation.

The messenger, Hummingbird was asked to investigate. He was sent down to the west, to "Changing Woman's" floating house of turquoise.

There the messenger found all the natural valuables and essential elements that The People had been missing. All these he brought back to The People in Navajoland (the mainland).

Because of the quarrel that The People were having and after the return of all the natural elements to Navajoland, "Changing Woman" felt awfully lonely. This led her to originate the First Four Clans. It is said that she originated the Four Clans by rubbing her skin under her arms producing four men. Thus the First Four Clans appeared.

The following were the clans:

TÓDÍCH'ÍI'NII:

The Bitter Water Clan. *He was assigned Bullsnake as "his horse", Bilíí, his guide and protector.*

The four men were also each given a cane (gish). The purpose of the cane was to dig a hole in the ground for water during their journey. Then the journey back to the mainland began.

On their journey back to the mainland, the People became thirsty for water, so one man was allowed to dig for water with his cane. The first person dug a hole in the ground for water.

To The People's astonishment, the water was bitter. So this person was named The Bitter Water Clan, Tódích'íi'nii. The water was so bitter that they drank only a little.

TÓ'ÁHANÍ:

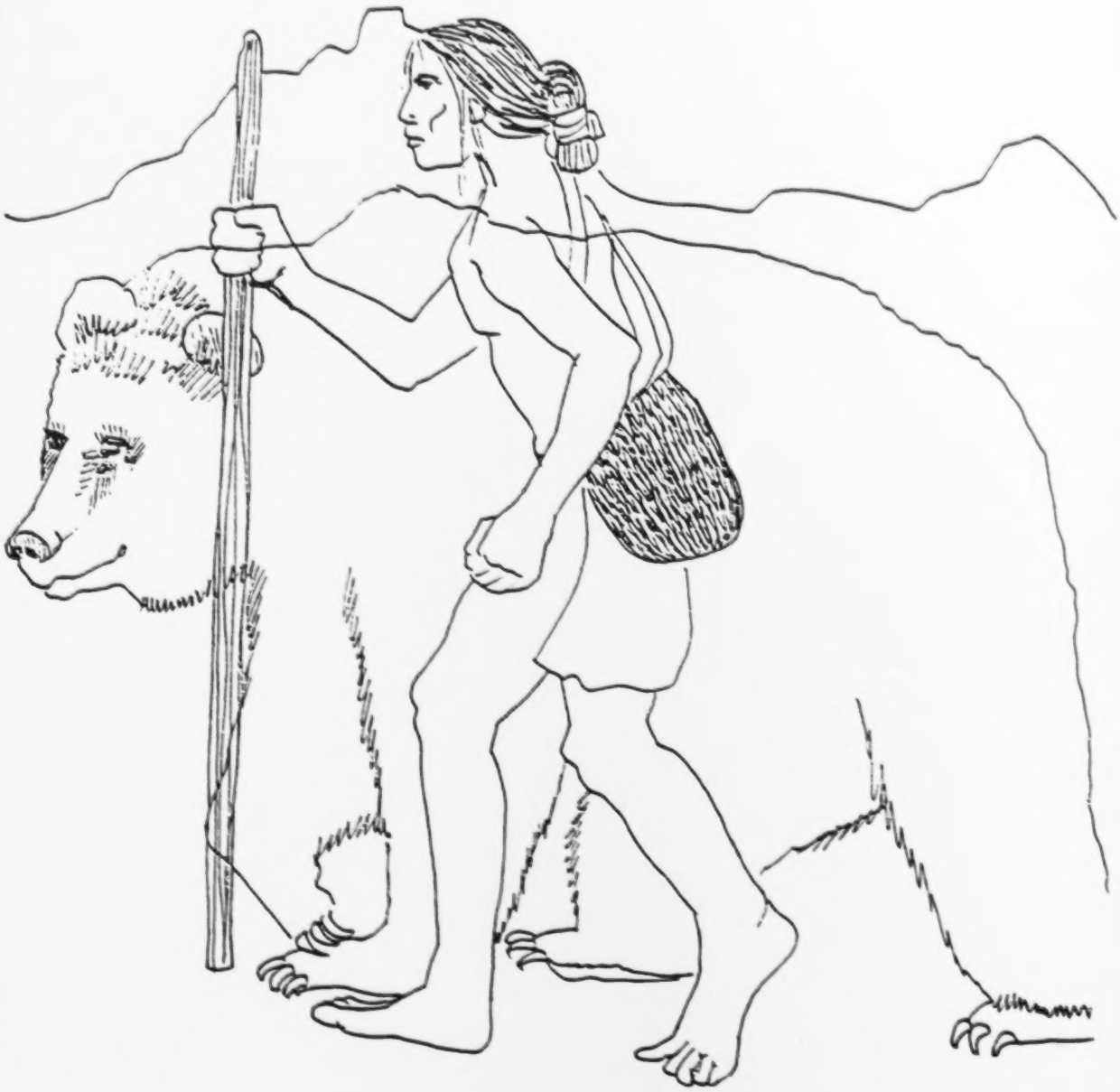
Near the Water Clan. *He was assigned a lion as "his horse", Billi, his guide and protector.*

As the journey continued, The People became thirsty again. An elder person was asked to dig for water this time. He dug a hole in the ground for water with his cane. This person didn't have to dig very far or very long to get water. The water came above the ground surface immediately. This person was classified as Tó'áhaní, which means "Near The Water" or "Water Is Near".

KINYAA'ÁANII:

The Towering House Clan. *He was assigned Big Wolf as "his horse", Bilii, his guide and protector.*

The journey continued. The third person was given a chance to get water. He began digging for water, but all his efforts were unsuccessful. He became tired and left his cane leaning against the canyon wall and stood beside it. When the People saw his cane and him standing there next to it, it looked as if he was standing against a house, with the canyon wall in the background. So they called him Kinyaa'áanii, meaning Towering House clan. Because he was unable to find water, he was given a different clan name.

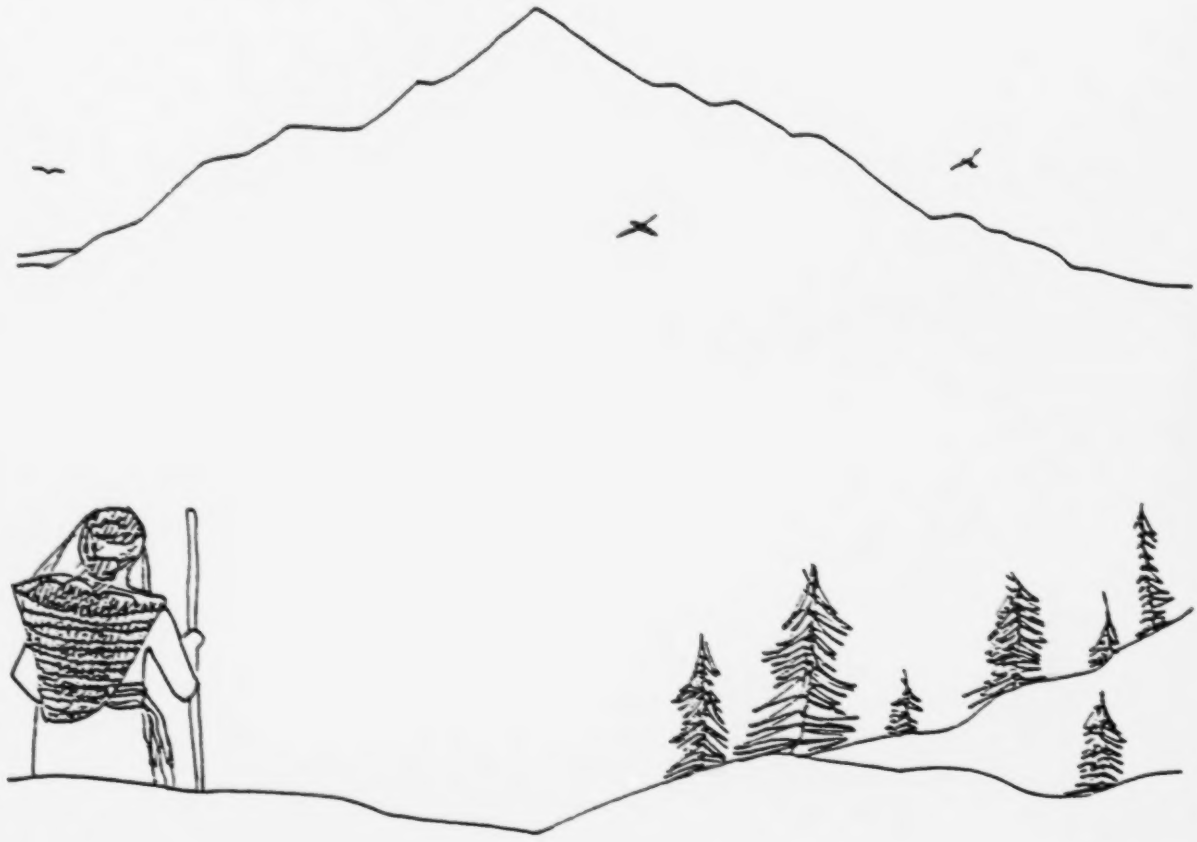


TÓTSOHNII:

Big Water Clan. *He was assigned Big Bear, The Grizzly, as "his horse", Bii̯i̯, his guide and protector.*

The journey proceeded once again and The People became thirsty. This time the fourth person was given permission to dig for water. This person dug in the ground and found plenty of water, enough to cause a flood. So this person was classified as Tótsohnii, which means "Big Water".

The journey back to the mainland was near its completion. This journey is referred to as the "Blessing Way" or the "Beauty Way" (Hózhǫ́ǫ́jí) journey back to Navajoland. Changing Woman or "White Shell Woman" was responsible for the Beauty and Blessing Way ceremonies; therefore the songs that are sung are referred to as the Woman's Songs, Asdzáán Biyiin. The same songs are sung for a pubescent girl when preparing for her puberty ceremony, when she becomes of age.



In those days the Holy People (Haashch'éé́h Dine'é́) were very close to the Navajos, and many times they actually visited and taught them. Through these teachings the power and the beauty of the Holy People became known to the Navajos, and, as a result, they increased and prospered.

Under the guidance and protection of the Holy People many more Navajo clans came into existence, and the small handful of people who had come into the Fourth World, even with the creation of the four clans by Changing Woman, grew and grew. Today, we know of the following additional clans.

DIVISION OF THE PEOPLE

As the years passed most of The People started moving around from place to place. As they moved, they left one group, Bé́ǐyoodzin (the Paiutes), in the Naatsis'á́ (Navajo Mountain area) because of differences over religious matters. From this area, the main group moved down toward the south, where they left the Chíshí (Chiricahua Apaches). Then they went to the east, where the Naashgalí Dine'é́ (Mescalero Apaches) decided to stay. These Mescaleros now live from Albuquerque all the way down to the home of the Naakai (Mexicans). From there, the people again moved to the vicinity of Dibé́ Nitsaa (La Plata Mountains), where the Beehai (Jicarilla Apaches) eventually settled. The People remained there for seven winters. They were happy, but there was one problem. The summers were too short. Because there was not time for the squash and corn to ripen, the main group moved to Tsé́ Naajiin (Cabezon Peak).

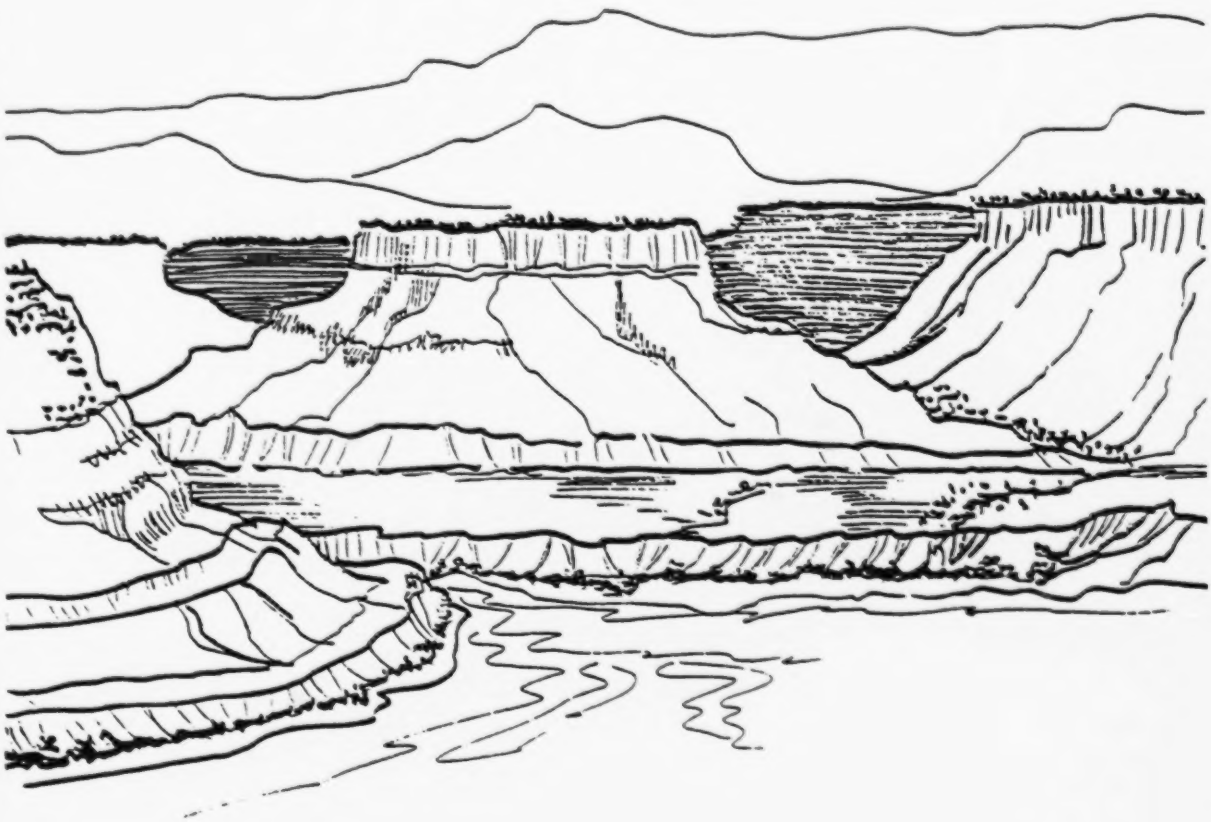
The home of The People eventually existed within the boundaries of the four sacred mountains. The names of these mountains were decided upon Haashch'éé́h Dine'é́ (Holy People), and one god was left within each of these mountains. That is why they are sacred to this day. Eight more smaller mountains also are holy.

There is a Yé́'ii (God) whose body starts at the foot of Tsoodzil (Mount Taylor) and curves all the way around on the outside of the four Sacred Mountains, with the head stopping at Sis Naajiní (Blanca Peak). This was done to give The People protection. When the population increases so much that The People spread out beyond the boundary represented by the God's body, that will be the end of the Navajos. Because Navajo people live beyond that boundary now, it could be that they will run into difficulties with nature and will be out of harmony with the plan of the Gods.

It has been told that this is the manner in which the Navajos became a tribe.

ÁSHIIHÍ:

Salt People. *This resulted from the captivity of other tribal children. In this case, one girl who was captured lived at a place called Salt Extends Out, Ashiih Deez'á. This group of the people grew to be call the Ashiihí, the Salt Clan.*



MA'IIDEESHGIIZHNII:

Coyote Pass (Jemez). *Ma'iideeshgiizhnii clan is not particulary referred to as Ma'iideeshgiizhnii but as Nahodeeshgiizh, from where the clan Ashiihi emerged. This marks the Coyote Pass and Ashiihí as very closely related.*

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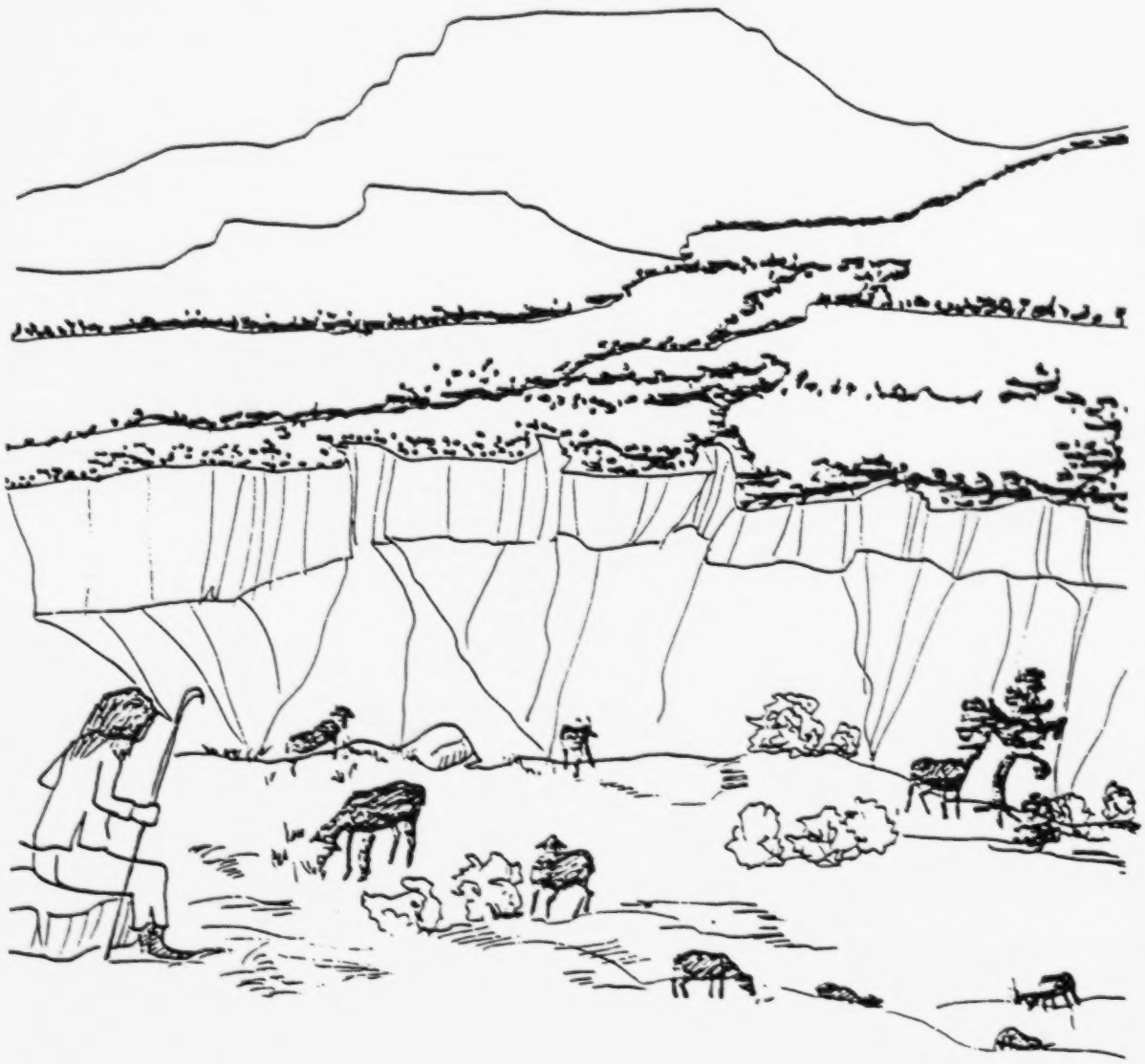


DIBÉ ŁIZHINIÍ:

Black Sheep Clan. *These were the herdsmen of numerous black sheep in the same area as Nahodeeshgiizh.*

BIT'AHNII:

His Sleeves, Under His Cover Clan. *This group of people happened to be on their journey to another part of the Navajoland when they came upon the camp of another group of people. So they made camp there. During the evening the people that offered the journeymen hospitality noticed that when it was time to turn in, the journeymen didn't have blankets or any beddings. Instead, they put their arms inside their clothing or folded their arms and slept like that. So the people on the journey were given a clan name, which is Bit'ahnii. "Under His Cover or Under His Clothing".*

HASHTŁ'ISHNII:

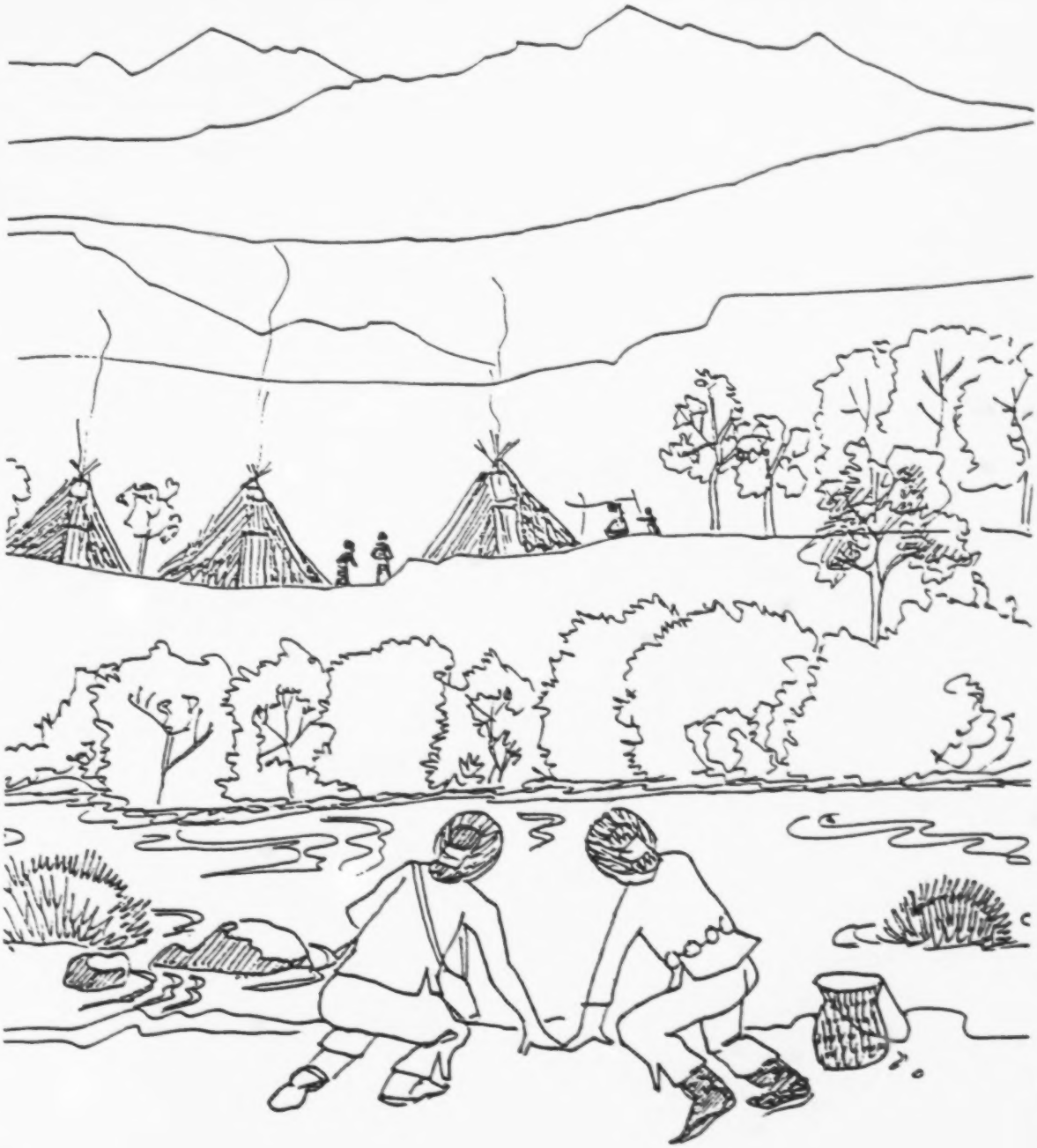
The Mud Clan. *This clan is closely related to Bit'ahnii. They became very close and good friends in the old days.*

TÁBAAHÁ:

Water Edge or Edge of Water Clan. *At the time this clan originated, berries were gathered close to and around a body of water, such as a spring or stream. These people ended up being Tábaahá, Water Edge Clan.*

TÓDÍK'ǪZHÍ:

Salt Water Clan. *This group came to be called the Salt Water Clan because it dwelled at a moist place where a lot of alkaline forms, which has a very salty taste.*



HALTSOOÍ DINE'É:

Meadow People. *Their clan name was given to them by the two who came to the water hole. The Haltsooí people evidently erected forked stick hogans for homes at a green meadow place, where they were given this clan name.*

HOOGHANIZÁNÍ:

The Many Hogans People. *The Tótsohnii clans were the ones responsible for giving the Many Hogan Clan name to these people because they had many homes in one spot.*

TÓ'ADHEEDLÍINII:

Water Flows Together. *This particular group of people resided at a place called "Where The Water Flows Together". It was there a member of the Naakaii Dine'é clan saw a young girl in the water. So this person attempted to save the young girl, but each time the high tide of the water kept this person from rescuing the child. Finally, a rescue was made. The young girl was given this clan name, Tó'aheedlíinii.*

NAAKAII DINE'É:

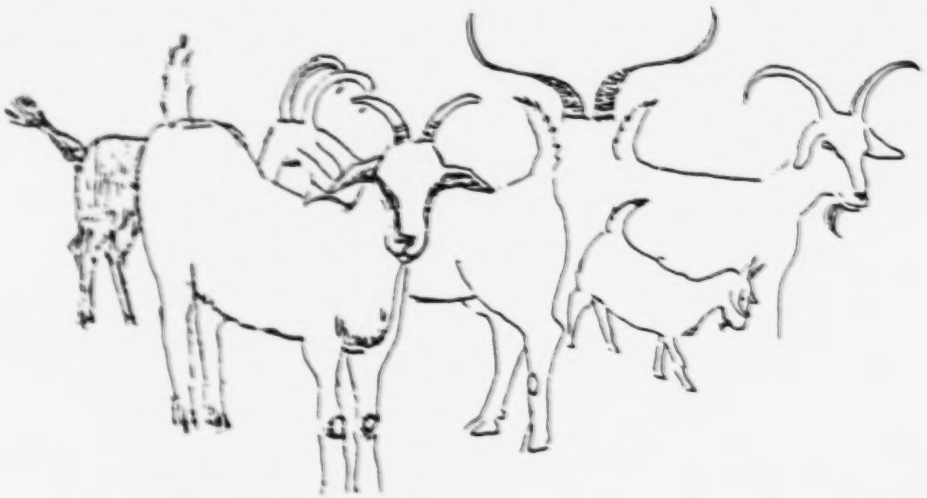
The Mexican People, meaning Nomads. *This group of people were nomadic hunters who moved from one place to another to hunt for game. Naakai means nomad—moving about a lot. Some say they were captured once, despite their transcient nature.*

KINLICHÍI'NII:

Red House People. *These People lived in red houses, evidently made from red rocks and red clay. They are also referred to as Kinchił, which is a marker like a totem pole or wood sculpture. This clan name was given to them by the Tł'ááshchí'í.*

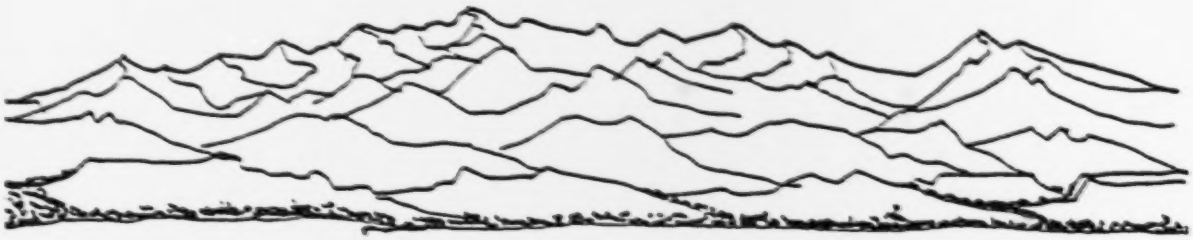
TŁ'ÍZÍ'ŁÁNÍ:

Many Goats. *This group of people consisted of herdsmen of many goats. They relied largely on the maintenance of large herds of livestock, especially goats, for their food. That is why they are called The Many Goats Clan.*



TSÍ'NAAJINII:

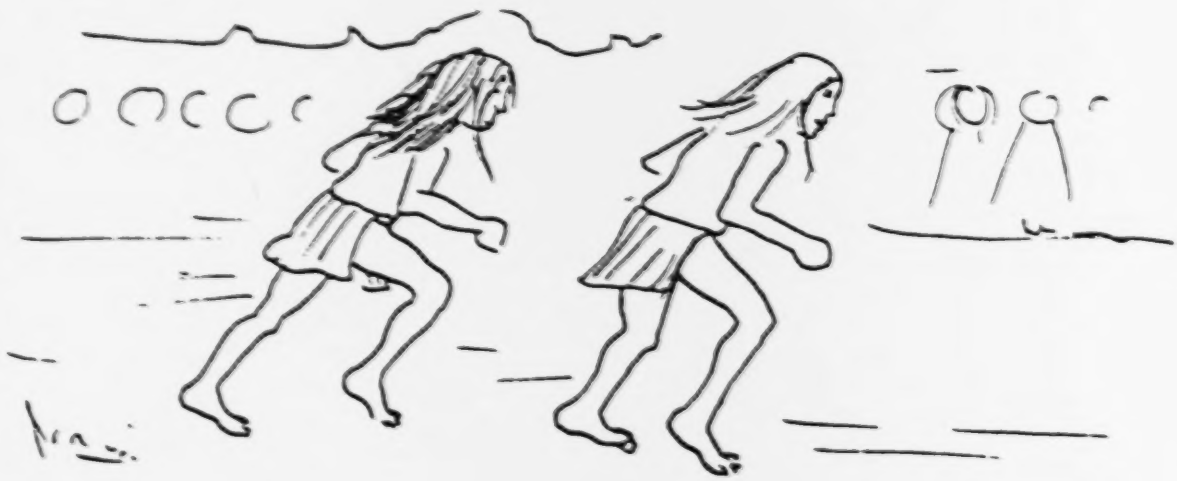
Black or Dark Streak or Wood People (also referred to as the Shash Dine'é or Bear People). *Tsi'naajinii clan, known as the "Bear People", emerged from the sacred mountains called Sis Naajiní, (Blanca Peak), or White Shell Mountain or Dawn.*



TŁ'ÁÁSHCHÍ'Í:

Red Bottom People (Painted Cheek is another translation for this clan). *These people used to run a race with another clan group. The group that witnessed this clan group observed that these people had pink feet or red on the soles of their feet. Tł'ááshchii' emerged from one of the sacred mountains called Ch'óólí'í (Gobernador Knob Mountain).*

It is said that this particular clan has the right to intermarry with any clan.



TA'NEEZAHNII:

Tangle People. *This clan group was also told that they belonged to the Spider People, because their teeth were like spider webs (Naaneezah). They are closely related with the Honágháanii clan.*

HASHK'ĄĄ HADZOHÓ:

Yucca Fruit People, Strung Out-In-A-Line Clan. *This clan group lived in an area where a lot of yucca fruit grew. The people gathered the yucca fruit prepared and preserved the fruit for long winter months and people living near them gave them the name.*

HONÁGHÁAHNII:

One That Walks Around. *A person belonging to this clan group said in a teasing way, "Why are you all tangled up?"—which later became a Ta'neeszahnii. Vice Versa, a person belonging to Ta'neeszahnii gave the Honágháahnii his clan name, because he kept walking around him.*

DZIL TL'AHNII:

Near The Mountain Clan, or the Mountain Cove. *This name is self-explanatory. The story regarding this clan begins as follows: This particular woman had just moved near some mountains. Therefore, she received the name, "The Woman Near The Mountain", Asdzą́ą́n Dził'aadi", which also became her clan.*

NÓÓDA'Í DINE'É:

Ute People Clan (related to To'aheedlíinii by captivity). *This means that the Ute children were captured by the Navajos during their raids on the Utes. This is how we have Nóódaí Dine'é among us today.*

NAASHT'ÉZHÍ DINE'É:

Zuni Clan People. *This name was given to this clan after they ran away from the Zunis and returned to the reservation.*

NAANEESHT'ÉZHÍ TÁCHII'NII:

Zuni/Red Streak Running Into The Water People. *This clan resulted from a young Navajo girl being captured by the Zunis and returning to Navajoland, when she was given this clan name. This is the reason why the Navajos have such a clan among them.*

DEESHCHII'NII:

Start of the Red Streak People (also, Bend of Red Rock). *This particular group of people made their home at a bend in an area of red rock, so they received the clan name Deeshchii'nii.*

TSÉ'NAHABIŁNII or TSÉ NAHADIŁNII:

Sleep Rock Clan. *This clan is related to the Tódích'íi'nii and Honaghaahnii clan. It originated from the Tówoohnii (Taos Tribe).*

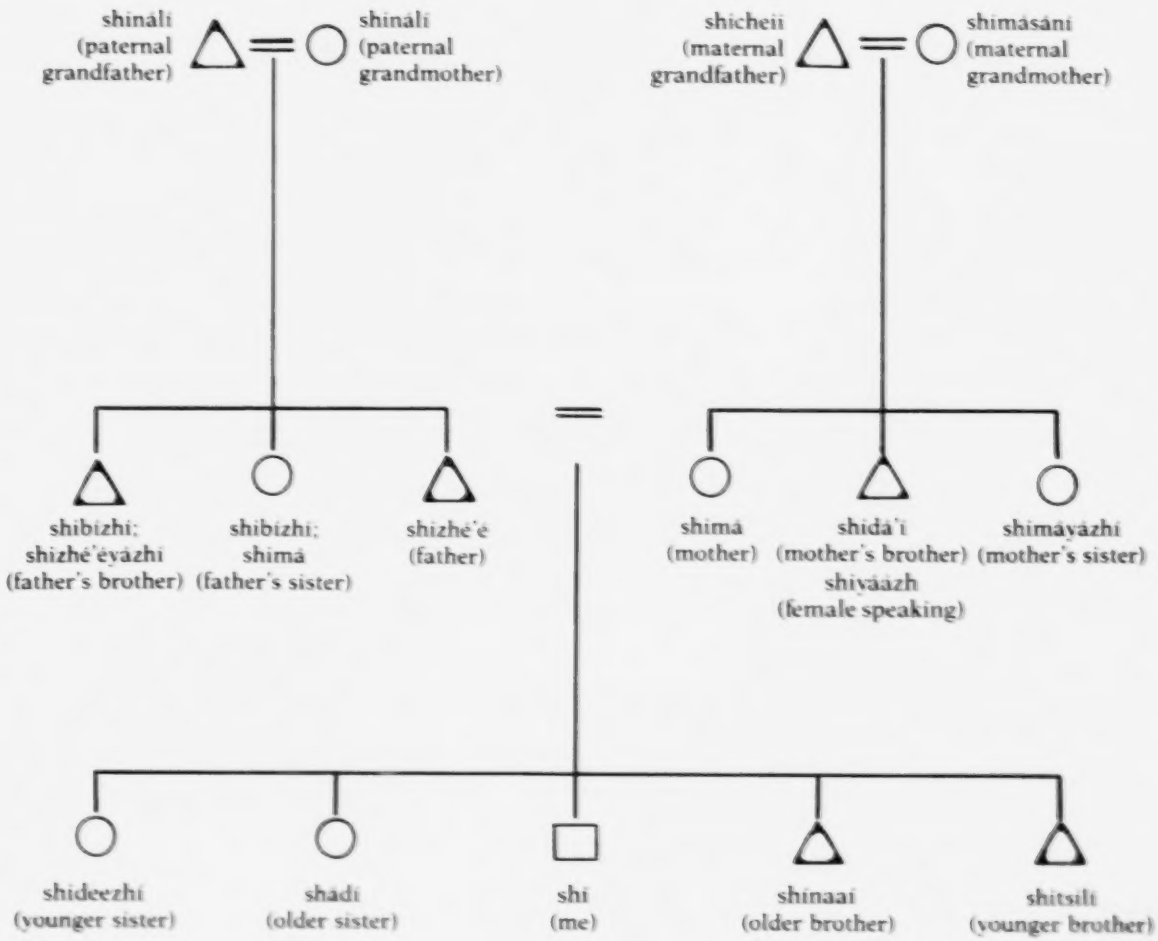
LÓKAA' DINE'E:

The Reed People. *This name came from the Hopis. They were raised by the Bit'ahnii (Under His Cover with Totsohnii clan), which is the Tsé deeshgizhnii (Rock Gap clan), Hooghanlani (Many Hogans clan), and a little of the Kinyaa'áanii (Towering House clan).*

The stories here are not complete clan histories. However, they do show where the roads back into history lead. They tell how the Dine lived when they first began to spread across the land, and how from the very beginning they were joined and strengthened by others they met.

Whoever wishes to know more will seek out the history of his own clans.

K'ÉÍ
NAVAJO KINSHIP SYSTEM
The Extended Family



Key

△ = male

○ = female

□ = no gender indicated

= = affinal (marriage) tie

— = consanguineal (blood) tie

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